

## How did plastic become a problem?

Plastic pollution is a problem because we use lots of plastic products that end up in the ocean. Before World War II, we didn't have a plastic problem. During World War II, plastics were used to make parachutes, airplane parts, guns, helmets, and much more. When the war ended, factories still wanted to make money, so they found more ways to use plastic. Plastic then started showing up everywhere! People start using lots of plastic, but they don't save it. After they have used something plastic, they throw it away. For example, people around the world use a trillion grocery bags a year but for just 12 minutes on average. Then, those bags end up in the ocean. Or, people throw away about 2.5 million plastic bottles every hour. Where does that plastic go? It eventually ends up in the ocean. About 90% of the trash in the ocean right now is plastic. Plastic trash is polluting our oceans!



Much of the plastic we use ends up in the oceans

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## How does plastic impact oceans?

Plastic pollution impacts the ocean by interrupting the delicate ecosystem in many ways. While most natural materials break down relatively quickly, plastic takes much longer to decompose. Because it breaks down into tiny pieces of **microplastic**, these pieces can stay in the ocean for 500 years. All of this plastic can be eaten by sea animals of all sizes, entering the food chain and being passed on to larger and larger creatures. As a result, some animals die because their stomachs fill with plastic instead of food. Even if animals don't eat plastic, they can become trapped and killed in plastic nets. Plastic also impacts the ocean by transporting plants and animals long distances. Since species are introduced to new areas, they can become invasive or take food from native species. Plastic trash disrupts the systems and patterns in the ocean that allow sea creatures to thrive.



Some animals mistake plastic bags for food, like jellyfish, and eat them.

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- **Microplastics** – very small pieces of plastic
- **Decompose** – to break down into smaller parts

## What can WE do about the plastic problem?

To reduce our school's use of plastic, we should stop using plastic straws for breakfast and lunch. Why? Because plastic straws don't decompose. Plastic breaks down into tiny **microplastics**, and they don't disappear. Those **microplastics** end up in the stomachs of fish and other animals that live in the ocean. Since this is very dangerous, I think a better alternative to plastic straws would be paper straws. Paper straws do decompose, so when they are thrown away, they don't end up in the ocean. The result is less exposure of plastics to fish and other ocean creatures. This leads to reduced plastic exposure for fish and other ocean creatures. It may be hard to get people to stop using plastic straws because they are convenient and cheap. One idea is to give people **incentives** for not using plastic straws. We could have a homeroom competition to see which homeroom uses the least number of straws per week. After a few weeks, it will become a habit, and people will forget about the plastic straws, leading to less plastic waste overall in our school. I am confident that if we all work together to stop using plastic straws we will be able to make an impact.



Plastic straws



Straws made from:

- Metal
- Paper
- Bamboo
- No straw!